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SUBJECT: EMBASSY OCTOBER 10 IFTAR DINNER -- IDENTITY ISSUES
STILL A MAJOR CONCERN FOR MUSLIMS

¶1. (U) On October 10, the Ambassador hosted his third Iftar dinner since arriving at post in 2004. He will host a fourth dinner on October 16. In welcoming the guests, the Ambassador noted that the Embassy was working actively to maintain close ties to the Muslim community, as witnessed by the November 2005 Muslim Outreach Conference in Brussels. These contacts had proven especially valuable during the past year, when events such as the Danish cartoons, the French riots, and the London bombings had done much to spark inter-communal conflict.

¶2. (U) As during the previous dinners, the guest list included senior Ambassadors from Muslim countries, and representatives from the Turkish and Moroccan communities, the two dominant groups among Belgium's 450,000 Muslims. Of the Belgian guests, community activists predominated. Discussion of their "street level" attempts to operate in Belgium's complex society was the principal topic of discussion.

¶3. (U) Both the Turkish-origin and Moroccan-origin guests agreed that community loyalty was a primary motivating factor in explaining the political behavior of Belgian Muslims. This loyalty explained some of the more interesting results of the October 8 local elections. Many Muslim local councilors gained their seats solely because of the preference votes they received from fellow Turks or fellow Moroccans. Although they deplored it greatly, the guests knew of few instances in which Turks had voted for Moroccans, or vice versa. The resulting lack of unity among Muslims dissipated the community's strength, as did a continuing generational split between the first generation and the second and third generations.

¶4. (U) Several of the guests described imaginative efforts their organizations are undertaking to promote a better relationship with Belgium's non-Muslim majority. The representative of one group described plans for a "pilgrimage" in early May in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews would take part in informational programs at a mosque, a Catholic church, and a synagogue. A female guest who had participated in the embassy's 2005 dialogue between Belgian and American Muslims expressed gratitude for the contacts she had developed with American co-religionists. Other participants in the dialogue and its follow on programs expressed similar sentiments.

¶5. (U) The Muslim country ambassadors noted that their citizens all fared differently in Belgium. There were, for example only about 550 registered Indonesians in Belgium. They were concentrated almost entirely in the north, and looked toward Holland for jobs and community. The 2,000-2,500 Egyptians here included missionaries from Al

Azhar. The 5,000 Iraqis in the country paid more attention to developments at home, than to participating in Belgian life. The Moroccan community, which numbered between 250,000-318,000, was the biggest single Muslim group in the country; a more accurate count would probably find 500,000 Moroccan-origin citizens, according to the Moroccan ambassador.

16. (U) In addition to the Egyptians, almost every major Muslim country attempted to provide some sort of officially-sanctioned religious leadership to its community in Belgium. The Moroccan community was especially active during Ramadan, and was looking for ways to do more during the rest of the year. That said, the Moroccans were sending Arabic teachers to work with the broader Moroccan community. Korologos

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